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ABSTRACT

A writing center serves freshmen and sophomores at Casper Community College in Casper, Wyoming and upper level classes at University of Wyoming/Casper College. The arrangement raises questions about the effectiveness of peer tutoring. Tutors were labeled "writing assistants" and those who came to the center for help were called "writers" or "clients." A dialectical view provides an alternative to the teacher-tutor dichotomy. Such a dialectical approach, which values a tension between traditional and radical pedagogies, may help change perceptions about writing center work. The dialectical image can help clarify, if not eradicate, the apparent contradiction in espousing collaborative methodology and identifying the development of independent learners as a goal. Seven Casper College writing assistants described what they do and how it relates to teaching. They identified differences in atmosphere and authority, contrasting the authoritarian setting of the classroom with the mutual discovery of peer tutoring. Application of the dialectic of learning to the dialectic of teaching and tutoring can keep the two in tension as processes that are recursive, interactive, and changing. Writing educators should strive to create an open-ended story always spinning out reshaped narrative lines working against established narrative lines in an ever-evolving text. (Three notes are included; 19 references are attached.) (SG)

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Helon H. Raines

TUTORING AND TEACHING: Continuum, Dichotomy, or Dialectic?

In a recent article "Teaching in the Center," Virginia Perdue and Deborah James challenge writing center advocates to document "the specific differences between conferences and tutorials" (8). Their essay underscores the June 1991 WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER companion piece by Marian Arkin, "A Tutoring Retrospective," in which she recommends more discussion of important philosophical issues including how tutoring differs from teaching" (4). Perdue , James and Arkin echo a growing chorus of voices re-examining the relationship of the writing center and the classroom.[1]

Reading the questions and challenges of these and other theorists helped me focus on an area of concern that has troubled me since the inception of the Casper College, University of Wyoming/Casper College Writing Center in 1988. Following the publication of Lisa Ede's article "Writing as a Social Process: A Theoretical Foundation for Writing Centers?", we complimented ourselves on having anticipated her call for centers to ground their practice in a firm theoretical base. Indeed, our planning committee not only agreed on theory and methodology but also articulated to others our belief in writing as a social act and our center as a place for collaborative learning. What we did not do, however, was to discuss precisely how the work of our

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tutors fit with the practices of teachers in presentational and/or collaborative writing classes.

In our two-plus-two institution, the writing center serves students in freshman and sophomore level classes of Casper Community College and also in upper level classes of the University of Wyoming/Casper College. This arrangement creates additional need for clarity because of diverse concepts about the teaching and learning of writing. For instance, composition instructors in community colleges place great emphasis on teaching writing well and are concerned about the quality of the assistance peer tutors offer. They also question the ramifications of students teaching other students effectively. As one colleague said to me, "If you can train tutors to teach writing in one semester, why do we need highly educated and experienced composition instructors?" On the other hand, some University faculty hoped their students coming to the center might learn in a few sessions what they had not absorbed in previous writing experiences.

Therefore, we needed to clearly discuss differences and similarities between teaching and tutoring. We were thinking about these issues when we decided to call our staff "writing assistants" and those who come to the center "writers" or "clients." Believing that language affects perceptions and behavior, we do try to choose words carefully. However, the terminology we use does not necessarily image for others what we intend as many people continue to see the center as a place for

tutoring and tutoring as a version of "teaching" on a somewhat lower level of the academic hierarchy.

In discussing these points with the Writing Center Advisory Committee, I was informed by a chemistry instructor that this matter of "teaching" and "tutoring" is only semantics. I believe his view implies that if the writing center is accomplishing its purpose to help people with writing, then clearly some learning should be taking place. If learning is occurring, then so is teaching. Do distinctions of language really matter?

I believe they do. Furthermore, a growing body of literature about writing centers emphasizes the relationship of writing centers, words and definitions. For instance, two articles in the tenth anniversary issue of THE WRITING CENTER JOURNAL (Fall/Winter, 1990), focus on language. Thomas Hemmeter in "The Smack of Difference: The Language of Writing Center Discourse" believes we shape ourselves by shaping our discourse. His discussion complements an article by Lex Runciman on "Defining Ourselves: Do We Really Want to Use the Word Tutor?" Runciman concludes that we do not (33) for several reasons, one of which is that we cannot escape the traditional meanings of the word "tutor," even though writing respondents do more than serve as first readers for the teacher or as instructors in basic skills. Hemmeter argues for the writing center as an evolving text and contends it is more than a place or a theory or a practice. "The writing center is an idea--in language," to which we must pay careful attention (44).

For many reasons we want to choose language that says what we want it to say. One of these reasons is that words create the concept and shape the realities of the writing center program. Still another reason is that our language also shapes the relationship between the center and the classroom. In writing center literature several visual metaphors reflect the language we use and thus image the relationship of teaching and tutoring. One of these metaphors is as points on a continuum with directive teachers at one edge and responsive listeners at the other. A second metaphor envisions writing centers and classrooms as dichotomies, emphasizing differences in teaching and tutoring, although occasionally referring to similarities.

As an alternative image, I propose a dialectical view. This image may assist in revisioning perceptions about writing center work and in recreating what we do when we teach in our classrooms as well as what we do when we respond in the writing center. A dialectical process avoids stasis and values a tension between traditional and radical pedagogies. I suggest that such tensions and their resulting resolutions could help us to avoid the pitfalls Tom Hemmeter sees in setting up dualities which privilege one or the other. Building on his argument, I contend that a dialectical image will help us to clarify, if not to eradicate, the apparent contradiction in writing centers espousing collaborative methodology and also defining our goals as the development of independent learners. For my concerns at the local level, this dialectical metaphor provides a productive way of thinking about both teaching and tutoring and a more

effective language for articulating these ideas than do the images of continuum or dichotomy.

For an example of the image of teaching and tutoring as points on a continuum, we can turn to an article in the November, 1990, WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER by Jane Edmunds, Lorraine Lordi, Violet Dagdigian and Leslie Vanwagner, Rivier College tutors. They propose three chronological stages in tutoring. The first stage is the writer's initial visit when the tutor is a "guide... who shows the way by directing" (11). In the second stage, the student and tutor know one another so the tutor is a "counselor...a knowledgeable person whom one goes to for advice" (11). In the ideal progression to stage three, the tutor becomes "mentor...one who encourages or promotes..." (12) so the student is ready to "write on her own" (15). Even though the authors describe this model as "recursive," the tutor moving among roles, to meet the "individual needs of...students" (15), the model seems linear, the tutor beginning as director and ending as resource.

A modification of this stage view of tutor conferencing is found in the report of a study conducted by Willa Wolcott at the University of Florida where she observed the tutoring styles of seven graduate students who also were experienced teachers. In "Talking It Over: A Qualitative Study of Writing Center Conferencing," she states that the "complexities" of writing center conferencing make "a far different experience from that of conferencing in a classroom" partly because tutors are

"middlemen" working between teacher and student (16). As part of her study, Wolcott applied the criteria developed by Thomas Reigstad after he observed conferencing practices of professional writer-teachers, ultimately categorizing their methods into three primary types. "In the teacher-student model, the teacher is the expert and does most of the talking and the work; in the collaborative model-the most common one-the teacher and student work together to solve the writing problems; and in the student-centered model, the student determines the direction of the conference and does most of the work" (Wolcott 17). Applying these categories to her teacher-tutors, Wolcott concluded that their "conference dynamics typically reflect the teacher-centered model...although the tutors and students tend to collaborate more as each conference progresses..."(25). Both Reigstad's models and Wolcott's examination of those models suggest a continuum or set of elements in which a second element is present although movement toward the third element, here the student-centered conference, seems desirable.

While the continuum, moving from directive authority, through moderating coach, to responsive audience, is imaged in writing center discourse, far more common is the oppositional imagery of the directive, evaluative teacher versus the responsive, nonjudgemental tutor. A summary of the most frequently articulated differences in teaching and tutoring could begin with Stephen North's 1984 COLLEGE ENGLISH essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center." North says the teacher makes the assignments and requires the conference which, driven by time

constraints, allows little composing during the conference. Opposing all aspects of this model is the tutorial.

Citing North and other theorists in "The 'Smack of Difference': The Language of Writing Center Discourse," Tom Hemmeter concludes that a continuing focus on oppositions works against writing centers' best interest. For instance, he demonstrates that discourse articulated in dualities sets up a "binary structure" (38) in which the second element gives status to the classroom as in "grammar instruction versus instruction in rhetoric...; nontraditional students versus mainstream students;... basic writing versus comprehensive program" (37). Yet this dualistic thinking also can "invert the hierarchy to claim writing center superiority over the classroom..." (38). In that oppositional posture, writing center students "...take initiative, have open time, work on writing in progress at any time without fear of judgment...while in classes students are passive, have time limits, work in large groups in impersonal settings...and approach writing as a product to be judged" (38). Hemmeter's concerns about this discourse are multiple, but one is instructive to my argument. Neither of these oppositions is true, or at least not the only truth, for the reality in most cases is between these extremes. As Dave Healy points out in his 1991 CCCC conference paper, the differences articulated by writing center theorists probably are an "overdramatization" since the atmosphere in the center "is not significantly different from that of many composition classrooms" which employ

collaborative methodology (4). To use the metaphor of story telling, discourse located primarily in reflecting differences between writing centers and classrooms creates fictions with plot lines that never meet, never cross, never resolve.

To locate the perspective of writing assistants who are both newly and actively engaged in tutoring, I invited seven Casper College Writing Assistants to continue our year-long discussion of issues concerning teaching and tutoring. In an informal writing, they described what they do in response sessions and how they believe that relates to teaching. Echoing the language of opposition found in the literature, they see differences in atmosphere and in authority. The writing center is "warm, inviting, safe," while in classes, students "experience anxiety" (Brown). Furthermore in the center, "there is no authority; it's just a sharing of information" (Katsimanis). "Teaching is more prescriptive" (Glendenning) while "as a tutor, I feel like a compatriot" (Mendoza). "Teachers often lecture, instruct, and evaluate" (Robidoux) while a peer tutor's "job is responding in such a way to help our fellow students, not to teach them" (Grant). Summing up these responses, the Writing Center Associate wrote, "teaching is imparting information; whereas peer tutoring is a process of mutual discovery" (Schukman). He continues, "when the term teaching is used in its conventional, pedagogical context....teaching and peer tutoring are as different as galactic galaxies and doughnuts..." (Schukman).[2]

A more integrated view was offered by one of the Casper College faculty assistants.

> As a teacher who tutors, I see only surface differences, but on reflection I find significant differences in both attitude and activity. When teaching, I am an active agent with the student playing a passive role. I do most of the talking. When tutoring writers, I am less directive and serve more as a thought reflector. I listen and respohd more and wait more. The key difference is attitude. Teaching makes the activity mine. Tutoring focuses on the writer."
>
> (Stedillie)

I suggest that it is in the play of attitudes and activities we begin to see the possibilities of the dialectical image. This way of envisioning the relationship between tutoring and teaching seems to me to be closer to the realities of many classrooms and of many tutoring sessions. A dialectical image also reflects a desirable process that avoids privileging any particular position except in the situational context. Envisioning play between the activities could encourage difference without seeking domination. Furthermore, the dialectical process encourages the richness of paradox where two apparently contradictory elements can nonetheless be true. Thus, we can posit individualization of one-to-one conferencing within a theory of the social construction of knowledge as practiced in collaborative learning.

Other writing center advocates also recommend avoiding rigid concepts of tutoring which may limit the possibilities of creative pedagogy. For instance, Irene Clark in "Maintaining

Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma" challenges us to continue to value "chaos" which she defines as a "...willingness to entertain multiple perspectives on critical issues, an ability to tolerate contradictions and contraries, in short, not to become so dogmatic, so set in our ways, so fossilized, so sure that we know how to do it 'right' that we stop growing and developing" (82). Judith Summerfield also questions institutionalizing and popularizing terms such as "workshop approach" and "process approach" because the unreflective use of our language can interfere with the fluidity such terms symbolize and "make static a fluid act" (6). Clark also reminds us that in "Embracing Contraries" Peter Elbow encourages the teaching profession to encompass what seem to be contradictory situations, for instance in being both "nurturing" and "tough" (Clark 82). Citing Elbow's challenge as support, Clark warns against writing center's allowing our supportive self to establish a reductive methodology where "rules" about tutor intervention undermine true dialogic exchange in total abdication to the student (86-90).

Mark Waldo goes even further in de-emphasizing differences. In "What Should the Relationship Between the Writing Center and Writing Program Be?", he states that ideally the two should share theory and pedagogy to form a "symbiotic" relationship, a "purposeful bonding,...[which] makes . . . the center essential to the academic mission of the university, not peripheral to it" (75). David Healy also points out that it is only reasonable

that writing centers and programs share complimentary goals ("Politics" 4). I contend, however, that it is problematic to seek a consistently mutual pedagogy and theory. The benefits of an organic whole may be appealing, but such unity probably is impractical and furthermore ultimately detrimental to the process of becoming more than either may be as we presently exist.

To draw my analysis to a close, I turn to Carol Singley and Holly Boucher who, in arguing for dialogue in tutor training, invoke Paulo Freire. They remind us that "learning is born out of paradox....[for] creative response to conflict requires the freedom to change--learning depends on the freedom to play" (11). In their interpretation of Freire, oppositions "...converse (turn together) so that neither is convinced (defeated) but both are changed, or moved" (as interpreted and paraphrased from Singly 11). They continue. "This productive paradox...involves two aspects which we assume are opposites, but which actually create fruitful interplay " (12). In fact, they encourage us to expand our language, and our thinking, when they conclude that "education involves neither teachers nor tutors, but participants" (14).

I propose that we apply this dialectic of learning to the dialectic of teaching and tutoring in order to keep the two in tension as processes that are recursive, interactive and changing. Such processes mean that we continue to question, to reflect, to experiment, to be open to difference, while remembering similarities.

In conclusion, let me supply two examples of applications of my argument. The Casper College Faculty Assistant I quoted earlier expresses the transformative nature of radical pedagogy working against more traditional methodology when she says "the experience as a tutor has altered the ways I approach the teacher/ writing conference and also the ways in which I respond to student writing." She concludes "my style of responding has been greatly improved" (Stedillie). In my experience also, my tutoring improves my teaching; on the other hand, my teaching improves my tutoring. For instance, I have confidence because of my experience and authority as a teacher about my responsibility to intervene, to be at least an equal participant, even to become directive in a conference.

As an example of positive resolution in the conflict between teachers in my school and the development of our writing center, I cite one situation that has benefited our writing center. While I cannot train tutors to be teachers in one semester, we established a year-long, intensive writing assistant training program which stresses a self-image among tutors of themselves as <u>developing</u> educators employing a responsive technique which does not require them to be experts or authority figures in any area. However, the dialectical image of tutoring and teaching has led to a revision in my emphasis in the training. The revised program, while continuing to encourage tutors to maintain interaction with clients in a collaborative methodology, also legitimizes their taking a directive stance in certain cases.[3]

A search for wholeness, for unity, is an admirable activity, as is genuine respect and tolerance for differences. Let us then continue to investigate differences and to use differences to maintain a fluid perspective in which no one perspective dominates and controls the paradigm. To accomplish such fluidity, let us continue emphasis on our discourse reminding ourselves that words are not fixed, nor do they reflect the final or ultimate truth. Neither are words the things themselves; they are symbols which we infuse with meaning(s) that radiate and resonate. The symbolic nature of language allows us to modify, alter, change. If the word "respondent," "assistant," "consultant," or "participant" best expresses the emphasis in writing center work, then let us use that language as oppositional to conventional "teaching" in order to change the classroom controlled by the monologic teacher. On the other hand, we should not lose the collaborative spirit of the writing center by abdicating all speech and action to the writer. Our goal is for the best of teaching to enter the tutorial and the best of tutoring to imbue teaching with new practice, collapsing both at some point into a new perspective in the dialectical process. To return to the metaphor of writing centers, discourse, and text, we should strive to create the open-ended story always spinning out reshaped narrative lines working against established narrative lines in an ever-evolving text.

NOTES

[1]The articles cited in this essay all deal either explicitly or implicitly with the relationship of classroom to writing center. Another example of the centrality of the discussion on tutoring and teaching is one of the writing center sessions at the 1991 CCCC in Boston, the theme of which was "Re-examining the Nature of Writing Center Tutoring vs. Classroom Teaching." The issue also is addressed in two articles in the Spring/Summer 1991 WRITING CENTER JOURNAL which appeared after this essay was written. Articles by David Healy and Lea Masiello with Malcolm Hayward are listed here on the reference page.

[2]The collaborative process of invention, discovery, and writing is demonstrated in the production of this essay. My interaction with the Casper College Writing Center staff is a collaboration from which I have developed these views on the topic of tutoring and teaching. In this note I have the opportunity to thank them for the rich experiences of the past two years. I also can apologize for omitting so much of what the Writing Center Assistants have said, both in their written response to the question of teaching and tutoring and in their many conversations with me on the subject. To them I owe a view of the reality of the mix of teaching in tutoring even though the compression of their comments in this article does not reflect their exploratory thinking which was a constant corrective to my own desire to dichotomize writing center response and classroom teaching.

[3]Our revisions in the CC, UW/CC Writing Center training program admonitions against directive intervention reflect one of the resolutions Dave Healy also suggests in his recent article (listed below) on tutorial conflict.

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This article is a revision of a presentation given at the 1991 Conference On College Composition and Communication in Boston. The author designed, developed and coordinators the Casper College and University of Wyoming/Casper College Writing Center which was the first joint program of the two institutions. She also has published articles in COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION and WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION.